

UNIFORMED PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION OF CONNECTICUT

AFFILIATED WITH INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

30 Sherman Street, West Hartford, CT 06110

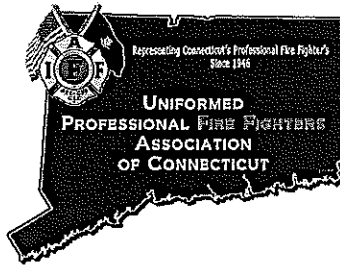
Office: (860) 953-3200 Office Fax: (860) 953-3334

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS

Peter S. Carozza, Jr., *President*

Louis P. DeMici, *Secretary*

Robert P. Anthony, *Treasurer*



Rick Hart

DIRECTOR

Legislative/Political Affairs

Good afternoon, Honorable Chairs Rep. Ritter and Sen. Gerratana, and members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Richard Hart. I represent the Uniformed Professional Firefighters Association of Connecticut which represents 60 Local affiliates of the International Association of Firefighters. Membership in the UPFFA is comprised of approximately 4,000 Union firefighters in Connecticut. I am here to express our strong support for HB 5053 AN ACT INCREASING ACCESS TO OVERDOSE REVERSAL DRUGS.

As the saying goes, this legislation is a slam dunk. The heroin epidemic, and it is truly an epidemic, does not recognize any socio-economic, ethnic, or racial boundary. Every day there is an unfortunate story or obituary of a citizen that loses their struggle with opioid addiction. The Connecticut Chief Medical Examiner estimates 387 lives will be lost due to heroin overdoses in 2015. I understand this legislation is but a band-aid on the greater issue of prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation, but it is crucial to keep people from dying to give them a chance to seek treatment.

Statistics speak to the alarming rise in heroin overdoses and poly-pharmacological overdoses. According to the CDC, "During 2014, a total of 47,055 drug overdose deaths occurred in the United States, representing a 1-year increase of 6.5%, from 13.8 per 100,000 persons in 2013 to 14.7 per 100,000 persons in 2014. The rate of drug overdose deaths increased significantly for both sexes, persons aged 25–44 years and ≥ 55 years, non-Hispanic whites and non-Hispanic blacks, and in the Northeastern, Midwestern, and Southern regions of the United States. Rates of opioid overdose deaths also increased significantly, from 7.9 per 100,000 in 2013 to 9.0 per 100,000 in 2014, a 14% increase" (Rose A. Rudd, Noah Aleshire, Jon E. Zibbell, & R. Matthew Gladden, 2016).

As a former paramedic and current Deputy Chief for the Waterbury Fire Department, I have treated, and witnessed firsthand the effects of heroin and the capability of naloxone as an opioid antagonist. When a person overdoses, their respiratory system is depressed to a point where, if there is no intervention, respiratory arrest occurs. This opioid antagonist reverses the effects of opioids in a

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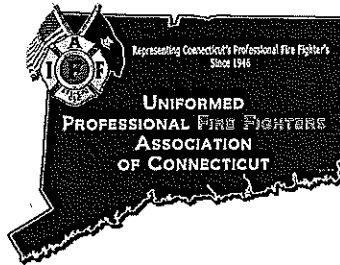
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matter of minutes, to the point where spontaneous respirations begin and the person is talking. In a period of 137 days, from July 16, 2015 to November 23, 2015, the Waterbury Fire Department administered Naloxone 129 times. That is 129 lives saved. Oxycontin costs on the street, approximately \$1 per milligram, so a 60mg. pill is obviously \$60. One bag of heroin on the streets of Waterbury, according to the Waterbury Police Department costs \$5 per bag. Heroin is also being cut with Fentanyl, another powerful opioid, which is approximately 50 times more potent than heroin according to the CDC, thus increasing the potency of the heroin, leading to a greater number of overdoses due to the user not being aware of the increased potency of the mixture. This is not only an urban issue, the demographics of overdose patients in Waterbury include suburbanites from Litchfield, Southbury, Watertown, and Ridgefield coming into Waterbury to purchase their heroin.

This legislation will ensure all of Connecticut's designated first responders will have this life saving opioid antagonist in their "tool box" to decrease the response time necessary to reverse the effects of opioids. I applaud the efforts of Aaron Frankel, and his staff from the Governor's office, members of CCM, who participated in the conversations, and the AFL-CIO for resolving at their last Constitutional Convention, to end opioid overdose deaths. I would like to especially thank Rep. Theresa Conroy for facilitating these conversations and taking the lead on this critical legislation. Finally, there will be questions and concerns as to the cost of the medication, but I ask any detractors, what price are you willing to pay to save your son, daughter, husband, wife, mother, or father from an opioid overdose?

Respectfully submitted,

Richard Hart

Director, Legislative and Political Affairs

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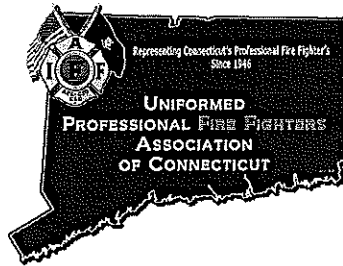
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